



Atopic Dermatitis or Eczema

The cause of atopic dermatitis is not known, although it tends to occur in families with allergies. There is no cure for this condition, but effective treatment is available. There is a tendency for improvement over the years, although the skin will always tend to remain dry and sensitive.

Bathing and Lubrication

Although in the past you may have been advised to limit bathing, we find daily bathing more effective. Soak in the tub in lukewarm water for 5-10 minutes with no soap. After bathing, remove excess water by patting with a soft towel and immediately apply lubrication, such as Eucerin, Lubriderm, Vaseline dermatology Lotion, or Moisturel. Bathing should be done at least daily and preferably twice daily for best treatment. It is also important to immediately apply a small amount of lubrication to the skin whenever it becomes wet, such as after hand or face washing or after swimming. Keep lotion by every sink.

It is best to use no soap at all, but when soap must be used, a mild soap as Neutrogena or Dove is preferred. Use soap or shampoo just before the end of your bath and rinse well to minimize soap exposure.

Itching

Keep fingernails short. Regular antihistamine by mouth should be taken to help control itching. Although it may cause drowsiness at first, this effect usually disappears after a day or two if it is taken on a regular basis. Many patients need it only at bedtime, Start with a low dose, then gradually increase it until itching is controlled. Continue to take antihistamine on a regular basis.

Corticosteroid Creams

Corticosteroid creams or ointments such as hydrocortisone help to heal the dermatitis. These penetrate into the deep layers of the skin, thus work best when applied immediately after bathing and before applying lubrication. They may be used sparingly once or twice a day.

Wet Dressings

Wet dressings are useful for severe cases. Soak the affected area for fifteen minutes in warm water. Apply the corticosteroid ointment sparingly, and then use a liberal amount of lubrication. For used on the legs or arms, use a four inch roll of 20/12 mesh gauze, about five yards. For the trunk, use eighteen inch gauze, 20/12 mesh. Hands can be treated using dermal cotton gloves. Soak the gauze or gloves in warm water and wring it out until no more drops come out, and it feels squishy. Wrap it around the area and pin it with a safety pin. The wet dressing is then covered with dry flannel or terry cloth, and should be changed after 3-4 hours overnight.

Clothing

Soft, breathable clothes such as cotton are best. Avoid occlusive clothing such as nylon tights or irritating clothing such as wool.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics by mouth are occasionally needed to control skin infections that may occur.